United Nations A/54/PV.77

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*Official Records*

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New York

*President*: Mr. Gurirab . . . . . (Namibia)

*The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.*

**Agenda item 34**

**Dialogue among civilizations**

**Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/546)**

**Draft resolution (A/54/L.60)**

**The President**: I should like to inform members that, in a letter dated 6 October 1999 addressed to the President of the General Assembly, the Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of Western European and other States for the month of October, requests that the Assembly hear in plenary meeting a statement by the observer of Switzerland in the debate on agenda item 34.

Taking into account the importance attached to the issue under discussion, it is proposed that the General Assembly take a decision on that request.

May I take it that there is no objection to the proposal to hear the observer of Switzerland?

*It was so decided.*

**The President**: I now call on the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.60.

**Mr. Nejad Hosseinian** (Islamic Republic of Iran): The countdown for the year 2000 has begun. In a few days we will be entering the third millennium. This is an exciting time to be part of the most universal body and to consider the most relevant topic relating to the nature of our common approach to our common fate in the twenty-first century. It is exciting to begin the new millennium with renewed affirmation of our determination to attempt to achieve the purposes and principles of the Charter through dialogue rather than through the clash of civilizations.

The United Nations is the ideal place to promote and to provide the momentum for dialogue among civilizations and cultures. In fact, Article 1, paragraph 4, of the Charter specifically states that one of the purposes of the United Nations is to be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these ends, which refers to the purposes stated in the Charter. Therefore, the United Nations is the centre to harmonize our actions in order to attain peace and security in conformity with the principles of justice and international law; to develop friendly relations with each other, based on respect for the principles of equal rights and self-determination; to achieve international cooperation through solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character; and to promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

These are not easy tasks. History clearly shows us that these are lofty ideals that are very difficult to fully

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achieve at the current level of human intellectual and ethical development. The way in which we currently view human beings and their relations, the world, and the concept and distribution of power represents a real peril to all those lofty goals of achieving real peace, security, justice and prosperity for all.

But as we enter the third millennium, when the world is daily becoming smaller and smaller, the peoples of different cultures are bound to get closer and closer to each other. When the interdependence of nations is a well-recognized fact of everyday life, and when communications and technological revolutions have gained a pace never before imagined, one can only hope that in the logical order of things the intellectual and ethical development of humankind will also gain speed and soon catch up with other advances made by humanity.

In order to facilitate and expedite such progress in human intellect and ethics to the point where the objectives enumerated above would become potentially achievable, we need to engage in serious dialogue in general, and in dialogue of the enlightened, in particular. We need the positive and constructive interactions of cultures and civilizations to nurture one another, and for human life to flourish. It is also through meaningful and genuine dialogue among peoples of diverse cultures, including — perhaps more importantly — the overwhelming majority of the world population who are dispossessed and have no voice, that those objectives may be attained.

Whatever "Dialogue among civilizations" is or may entail, the reactions it has received from world leaders, representatives of Member States and the general public would indicate that there is general agreement that President Khatami's proposal for a sharper focus on dialogue among civilizations and the designation of the year 2001 as the United Nations Year for this theme is not only timely, but a focus whose need is broadly felt. President Khatami has taken every available opportunity to further promote the institutionalization of dialogue among civilizations and cultures and to underscore the positive and humane utility of this paradigm to deal with our common challenges in the twenty-first century.

Without being overly ambitious, I think we should all take the fact that the idea of dialogue among civilizations was well received as a good omen that we will begin the twenty-first century with a step in the right direction, that is, we will seek to promote dialogue, listening, hearing and trying to understand one another. We will seek to promote dialogue in order to enhance mutual respect for, and understanding of, our differences. Dialogue among civilizations and cultures has the potential to take the mere tolerance of diversity a few steps further and enhance the level of discourse to the higher planes of caring, genuine cooperation and constructive engagement. While diversity generates growth and strength and enhances the beauty of human life, it should at the same time promote the solidarity of all human beings. On the one hand, promotion of identities and protection of civilizations and cultures must not become a pretext to shield exclusionism and ultra-nationalism, and on the other, advocacy of universalism must not become a ruse to undermine diversity.

I thank the Secretary-General and his Personal Representative for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations for the report in document A/54/546. I wish Mr. Picco success in assisting the Secretary-General and in translating dialogue among civilizations into practical steps for the United Nations. Operationalization of ideas, particularly ideas that are complex, would of necessity require limiting them. I recognize that need and agree with Mr. Picco's approach for operational definition of dialogue among civilizations. I also wish to reassure him of the support of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran for his endeavours to enhance a greater appreciation of diversity and to expand the common values of the membership of the United Nations.

Allow me also to express gratitude to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which has always been at the forefront of organizational endeavours to promote inter-cultural programmes to raise mutual respect and understanding among peoples of different backgrounds. I am sure UNESCO will continue to focus on dialogue among civilizations in order to develop a plan of actions to be pursued in the years to come, in cooperation with the Secretary-General.

Many Member States, including my own, have taken initiatives to organize preparatory meetings and conferences for the theme of the United Nations Year in 2001.

It is particularly noteworthy that the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) has established an intergovernmental group of experts to prepare the draft of a major document on global common values to be considered in the United Nations in 2001. The OIC has also decided to draft a ten-year programme of action to

commence in 2001 on the theme of the United Nations Year of the Dialogue among Civilizations.

My delegation is pleased to have had the opportunity to hold two panel discussions on different themes of dialogue among civilizations here in the United Nations, the first in May and the second last month, in November. My intention in arranging these panel discussions was to provide an opportunity to a mixed group of people to hear and exchange views with a select number of distinguished panelists about the first steps we need to take in promoting the long and surely arduous process of dialogue among civilizations. If attendance is any indication, I must say that the panel discussions have been welcomed by many people, including many of my colleagues who are here now. I am grateful to you, Mr. President, and to all members of the Assembly for your participation, comments, guidance and interests. I wish to thank many Permanent Representatives, delegates and United Nations staff members for their support, comments and guidance both in the panel discussions and privately. I am sure that many members of the Assembly would join me in expressing thanks to Mr. Mahbubani, the Permanent Representative of Singapore, for sharing his thoughts and wisdom with us in the second panel discussion.

Here are some of the key points of these two panel discussions which may be interesting to focus on in future debates. Intra-civilizational dialogue is as important as inter-civilizational dialogue. Dialogue among civilizations could lead to expansion of our common grounds and global values. Such dialogue requires, first and foremost, an inclusivist approach in which the interlocutors are equals and genuinely try to hear one another. Dialogue among civilizations promotes tolerance of diversity and more. The savage gap between the absolute minority of haves and the overwhelming have-nots in and among nations, as well as the question of power and its distribution, are perils for serious dialogue among civilizations.

My delegation has been encouraged to think of continuing to arrange constructive exchanges in the format of panel discussions. We are prepared to do that as long as there is an interest. One theme being explored is the potential role that dialogue among civilizations and cultures may have in humanizing the forceful process of globalization.

It gives me great pleasure to introduce, on behalf of the sponsors, the draft resolution entitled "United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations", document A/54/L.60. I wish also to point out for the record that the delegations of Australia, Belarus, Burkina Faso, Greece, Haiti, Malaysia, Malta, Norway, Philippines, Senegal, Slovakia, Sudan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates and the United States of America have also expressed their wish to be added to the list of sponsors of this draft resolution.

This draft resolution is fairly simple. It has incorporated the factual developments of 1999. It invites Governments, the United Nations system, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and non-governmental organizations to continue and further intensify planning and organizing appropriate programmes to promote the concept of dialogue among civilizations and calls upon Governments to encourage participation by all members of society in promoting dialogue among civilizations.

I wish to make a small oral revision to the seventh preamble paragraph by inserting "a culture of peace" before "remove threats to peace". The paragraph therefore reads:

> "Emphasizing the indispensable role of dialogue as a means to reach understanding, a culture of peace, remove threats to peace and strengthen interaction and exchange among and within civilizations".

The Islamic Republic of Iran and other sponsors hope that all Member States have had an opportunity to review this draft and are in a position to lend their unanimous support to its adoption.

**Mr. Shobokshi** (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Now that we are on the threshold of a new century, in a world undergoing tremendous changes, a world shaped by technological and scientific progress, telecommunications revolution and the rapid exchange of information, at a time when markets are becoming global, we can only hope that all these developments will increase interaction among nations in order to enrich cultures and civilizations and to strengthen the values of peace, cooperation and equality and the spirit of brotherhood among men.

The life of people is guided by their spiritual and material values and mutual interests; this has been the truth at all times and places. Nothing is more important than the enshrining of cultural values and ties among nations and peoples. Culture is the eternal sky that shields us and offers man the best, most favourable

context for the noble values received from our lofty Creator through his divine religions. Culture is multilateral and diverse, and the values it enshrines cannot be realized without cooperation, peace, justice and conciliation. Peace is a right given by God to all his creatures since the beginning of time. Justice is the basis of human coexistence, authentic coexistence. Conciliation is innately necessary to life.

Civilization is mere interaction and convergence among different cultures. What humanity has achieved today, modern civilization, is not just the fruit of the twentieth century. It is the result of the accretion of achievements in culture since the dawn of history. Peoples have enriched human civilization through their scientific endeavours, accumulation of knowledge, ideas and concepts, their achievements and discoveries. Thus we are all partners in the development of today's happiness and suffering. History teaches us that the structure and future of humanity develop through cooperation among peoples; they are born from the positive marriage of well-intentioned minds.

Yesterday we bade farewell to the cold war, and we pray to almighty God to protect us from any hot war as well as from the colder variety. A sense of unease and imbalance in international relations arises from the fundamental changes and the configuration of the international order born out of the Second World War. The unease and imbalance have been fostered by developments at the international level since the end of the cold war.

There are many ideas and conceptions of what is in store for the world after the cold war. All are based on an attempt to find the source of the new conflicts arising from current conditions, conditions that some claim are essential to the development of nations and peoples and are incentives to development and progress. According to some theories, the post-cold-war world will experience clashes of civilizations that will replace ideological clashes, as a result of the demise of communism. These conflicts will guide and in fact dictate States' policies. The fundamental characteristics of the different cultures and civilizations are said to determine interactions within the international community.

Others — forgetting that Islam is a faith and a way of life, not just a theory devised by intellectuals — have maintained that Islam is the greatest threat to the West since the retreat of communism. These people also forget that the interaction among cultures is a two-way street that enriches and elevates cultures and civilizations and increases their vitality.

International conflicts in the past and at present have been and are the result of attempts to impose political and economic hegemony, expand empires, consolidate zones of influence and so forth. Even ideological confrontations were conflicts designed to polarize and influence the other elements at work. Quite logically, the international community no longer accepts a unilateral perspective of world problems and rejects the predominance of a single community that seeks to subject the rest of the world to the values and interests of a single civilization.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been honoured by the Almighty. It has been endowed with the most important and sacred shrines of Islam. As the Koran, reflecting the sentiments of God Almighty, says:

> "O mankind! We created
> You from a single (pair)
> Of a male and a female,
> And made you into
> Nations and tribes, that
> Ye may know each other.
> Verily the most honoured of you
> In the sight of Allah
> Is (he who is) the most
> Righteous of you." (*The Holy Koran, XLIX:13*)

On the basis of this divine invitation to consolidate the links among human beings for the well-being of humanity, we support last year's General Assembly proclamation of the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. We congratulate the Secretary-General for having appointed a Personal Representative to handle this very important matter. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia also supported this proclamation during the twenty-sixth session of the Organization of the Islamic Conference — which was called the session for peace and partnership for development — held in Burkina Faso from 28 June to 1 July 1999. We attach great importance to the pursuit of the dialogue among civilizations as a way of building understanding among peoples and of finding a common basis for the development of the human mind in order to build peace and cooperation and avoid confrontations.

We appeal to the international community to use dialogue to fight selectivity, particularly to fight any vilification of Islam. Islam is a religion of peace and cooperation. It is undergoing a harsh onslaught and is

oppressed by attempts to link it with terrorist movements. This discriminatory attitude reveals an extremist turn of mind quite inappropriate to a culture of tolerance. Terrorism is an international phenomenon not confined to a single people, race or religion. Unfortunately it crops up everywhere, and we have to make every possible effort at the international level, including through the United Nations, to confront this phenomenon, in order to put an end to this scourge and protect the lives of the innocent and help States maintain their sovereignty and stability.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia hopes that the dialogue among civilizations will bring about a convergence of individual freedoms and collective rights. Such a convergence would promote respect for collective rights and positive interaction among policies and the interplay of the creative spirit of all peoples. A better future will thus be brought about through the establishment of peace, security, stability, solidarity, development and cooperation and by encouraging people to respect the characteristics and cultural diversity of peoples and civilizations.

**Mr. Aboul Gheit** (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran for its initiative to promote the concept of dialogue among civilizations within the United Nations. I would also like to welcome the appointment of Mr. Giandomenico Picco as Personal Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. I am confident that his distinguished experience and expertise will contribute to enriching, enhancing and promoting the concept of dialogue among civilizations.

I am honoured to speak today before the Assembly on behalf of a homeland and a State which is the cradle of civilization and the wellspring of cultures, a State that affected and was affected by human civilization. Egypt believes that the diversity of human cultures has been a source of strength and enrichment for humanity and should not be a reason for division and conflict. Egypt, the Pharaonic, Coptic and Islamic nation with close contacts with the Roman and Greek civilizations, will forever continue to be open to the world, believing in dialogue, tolerance, coexistence, justice and solidarity.

We, the peoples of the world, have taken it upon ourselves — on the basis of the joint ethical values of our various civilizations and regardless of our culture, language or religion — to save the world from the catastrophes of wars, to cooperate and seek understanding in order to achieve humanity's aspirations for peace, security, prosperity and development.

Yet regretiably, instead of taking the path of coexistence and peace, the world — at least in the twentieth century — has witnessed different forms of ethnic, tribal, religious and regional crises and conflicts. It has also suffered from exacerbated economic crises and nuclear and environmental dangers. Moreover it has been victimized by irrational uses of technology and of scientific progress.

Hence, it is necessary to activate dialogue among civilizations, regardless of their differences, in order to identify minimal intellectual, ethical and scientific common denominators through which we may cooperate to preserve the dignity, values, freedoms and particularities of humanity. We are duty-bound not to allow theories that espouse clashes among civilizations, with their pessimistic world-views, to become self-fulfilling predictions. While our diverse cultures without exception have given birth to any number of warmongers, tyrants and destroyers they have also given birth to great leaders, peace advocates, inventors, scientists, explorers and politicians who have registered many achievements.

Undoubtedly, dialogue among civilizations commands special importance as we approach the third millennium. Through it, we stress the resolve of our world and its diverse cultures to adopt a new approach based on common concepts and goals unencumbered by intellectual, cultural or religious beliefs and ideologies. History has shown that interaction based on mutual respect and benefits has been a cardinal element of the prosperity of many civilizations through the ages. Common endeavours to achieve understanding and cooperation among peoples and nations with different trends and cultures have contributed directly to the progressive development of the international community as a whole.

I wish to refer here to the statement made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt in the general debate at the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. He stated:

> "Humanity's attainments at this time and in this age are not the fruit of the achievements of the twentieth century alone; rather, they are the result of the accumulated achievements made since the beginning of time. The Egyptians excelled at science and

engineering and were the first to profess monotheism. The Babylonians gave the world the alphabet. The Phoenicians mastered navigation. The Arab civilization flourished in al-Andalus, preserved Greek philosophy and added to it. The Islamic civilization in Syria, Iraq, Egypt and Turkey made great contributions to all aspects of life. The Renaissance in the Italian city-States followed. Then came the French Revolution, advocating the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The industrial revolution started in Britain. America ushered in the computer, information and communication revolutions and the age of space exploration and atomic energy. I would also refer here to the profound philosophies and great civilizations that flourished in China, India, Japan and elsewhere.

"This is a necessary statement of fact as we bid farewell to this century and this millennium. Everyone must be aware that we are all partners in the creation of the contemporary genius. Yet the future is our real concern. The future brings with it new challenges in the fields of science and information; economic and monetary matters; culture, politics and security; and the conduct of relations between peoples and societies." (*A/54/PV.10, p. 19*)

Convinced that we are one international community based on intellectual pluralism and religious and cultural diversity, and that each nation is entitled to preserve its identity and characteristics, we believe that this diversity and these characteristics do not and should not weaken the unity of the international community. On the contrary, they reinforce that unity, which is based on honest competition, positive coexistence and joint appreciation of the accomplishments of all societies. The pride of every nation in its own civilization and history, and its adherence to its religion, traditions and customs should not be interpreted as declarations of war or as challenges to any specific ideology or civilization. Equality in sovereignty and the freedom of each society to choose suitable ideologies, traditions, customs and so on are legitimate demands that prompt us to emphasize the non-superiority of any civilization over another, regardless of its power, its military, economic and scientific development in any given era, the number of its accomplishments or the popularity of its beliefs and ideologies.

The main aim of the dialogue among civilizations should be to focus on the creation of a new world in which the particularities, values and nature of cultures and the patterns of traditions of all societies are respected. Respect for cultural diversity and the promotion of equality among cultures undoubtedly represent the loftiest indicators of civilization.

We are compelled in this regard to discuss globalization and its relationship to dialogue among civilizations. The transcendence of the barriers of space and time and interaction among peoples and societies are the most important consequences of the growth of globalization, which is the natural corollary to unprecedented and stunning scientific progress and its facilitation of the means of transport, communication, information and informatics technology.

Some people believe that globalization, given its tendency to unify the world economically and politically, is designed to undermine cultural pluralism and to threaten the civilizational particularities of peoples and nations. In Egypt, we do not accept this viewpoint, since the culture of any people is the product of a unique historical development and of deep social interactions that have left their mark and reveal themselves in conduct, trends and values. Hence, it is logical that most societies in our contemporary world do not accept this unilateral view of universal problems or the way to overcome them. They are also right in rejecting the hegemony of one society's interests and the subjection of the world's civilizations to the developments and considerations of one specific civilization and its interests.

Quite candidly and explicitly, some in the Western world imagine that Western civilization, in its European and American halves, reigns supreme over all of us. They also believe that it should impose its lifestyles and concepts on all walks of life, be they economic, social or political. They also believe that there are other, inherently hostile, civilizations that should be oppressed by force.

In Egypt, we are opposed to this flawed reading of current relations among civilizations. We do not deny, nor should we, that there are focal points or meeting points among civilizations, be they in place or time. This is a natural condition that has prevailed throughout human development and the progress of civilization. It will continue to be thus forever. What we wish to emphasize and what we will uphold is that these focal points will not clash, but will lead to contacts, dialogue and attempts at mutual understanding of the circumstances and particularities of each specific society. Attempts to exercise pressure and to obtain gains in terms of time or space will undoubtedly be resisted. This is not

in the interest of humanity's future or the development of human civilization in all its aspects and dimensions. The real challenge we should all meet lies in safeguarding cooperation, understanding and dialogue from aggression and dominance.

Throughout history, the world has witnessed the emergence of great empires that represented great civilizations. Over the ages, these empires clashed with one another and faded away. Yet, civilizations continued to emerge. Undoubtedly, this human experience leads us, as it should, to the logical conclusion that division and conflicts do not achieve development or progress; rather, dialogue, contacts, understanding and coexistence are keys to achieving a peaceful world free of conflicts, wars and attempts at hegemony and domination.

Despite the challenges and tragedies experienced in the twentieth century, we still sense a certain optimism in working together to achieve our aspirations in the new millennium. We want a better future for our citizens and peoples. We want the rights of peoples and nations to be respected, without disagreement on priorities and definitions. We wish that our joint political work would become stronger without applying double standards. We want real development that does not deepen poverty or ignore its causes. We want a clean environment and technology and science that are useful to all. Lastly, we want commitment to law and respect for the traditions and the purposes and principles agreed upon in the United Nations Charter.

In the course of this decade, and for the past two decades, the world has witnessed rewarding developments in the field of dialogue among religions and attempts at constructive coexistence and mutual understanding. These developments are supported and shared by Egypt in the strongest terms. We should admit that we will not achieve our aspirations unless we achieve serious and constructive dialogue among civilizations, based on mutual respect and equality.

The United Nations, as an assembly of various civilizations and cultures, can certainly play a vital role in merging the various viewpoints and enhancing such cooperation and understanding. The adoption by the General Assembly of the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace highlights our commitment to work within the Organization for a better future. The culture of peace — as a set of values and codes of conduct based on the principles of freedom, justice, democracy, development, respect for human rights, tolerance, solidarity, equality, parity, uniform standards, non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, prohibition of aggression and occupation, respect for pluralism, sovereignty and the unique character of each society — is an effective step in enhancing dialogue designed to achieve mutual respect and coexistence.

**Mr. Ka** (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): When it decided to declare the year 2001 the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, the General Assembly was mindful of the importance of building a world of peace, mutual understanding, tolerance and complementarity among nations, peoples and individuals. It has thus placed this event within the context of attaining the noble objectives of our Organization.

My delegation wishes to pay a sincere tribute to President Seyed Mohammad Khatami for having launched this important initiative and for his personal efforts to promote such a dialogue under United Nations auspices and within other organizations, such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

From the very outset, my delegation associated itself with the welcome initiative of the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran precisely because this timely initiative came along at a moment when the world was wracked by doubt and trends that threaten to reduce life in society to material relationships without any soul to them. This initiative also came at a time when, with globalization and the tendency towards uniformization, small countries were in danger of losing their identity, their culture and their heritage.

Last year I said that globalization of the economy, culture and thought, as well as increasing interdependence among nations on the eve of the third millennium, meant that we needed to have a new vision of international relations, one ruling out confrontation, racial hatred and xenophobia. It is the diversity of the world that is its wealth but the strength of tomorrow's world is contingent on its ability to cultivate a spirit of peace, tolerance, dialogue and solidarity among the different actors.

It is therefore fortunate that the Islamic symposium on the dialogue among civilizations, held last May in Teheran, adopted the Teheran Declaration, which defines the principles, the areas and the mechanisms of this dialogue.

It is true that the underlying issues of the dialogue among civilizations are not foreign to the United Nations. Although not entirely new, they are still topical and pertinent in the context of our contemporary world and in view of the great challenges facing humankind at the end of this century and this millennium.

In recent years, the General Assembly has adopted several resolutions or declarations advocating dialogue, understanding and respect for differences. In resolution 48/126 the Assembly proclaimed 1995 as the United Nations Year for Tolerance. In 1996, the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance was adopted. In 1997, the Assembly decided to proclaim the year 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace. Finally, in 1998 the decade 2001-2010 was proclaimed the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World. All of these initiatives reflect our common commitment to promote an era of cooperation and understanding among the various civilizations of our planet in order to uniquely affirm our shared human values.

I congratulate the Secretary-General for his hands-on involvement in this issue in appointing a Personal Representative last August for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, Mr. Picco. From the provisional report Mr. Picco has submitted, we see in particular that the dialogue among civilizations assumes many forms, ranging from the cultural dialogue between Islam and the West to dialogue among the major religions, including cultural and political exchanges among the heritors of historic civilizations.

This dialogue has become necessary and can help to prevent and control conflicts and rationally manage the differences and identities of each culture and of each tradition, all the while promoting the expansion of human values that we all share.

Today, more than ever before, our world must face all types of racial, religious, ethnic, cultural and political intolerance. It must allow diversity of culture and civilization. But I hasten to add that the promotion of cultural diversity does not mean refusing to take into account universal values such as respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It cannot mean acceptance of harmful discrimination against women or denial of the rights of the child.

*Mr. Ikouebe (Congo), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

My delegation is firmly convinced that the United Nations, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), other agencies such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the non-governmental organizations can play a central role in the promotion of a fruitful intercultural dialogue among civilizations. This dialogue is a necessity, even within the same civilization. As was quite rightly noted by the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, most of the recent conflicts in which the United Nations was asked to intervene or to serve as mediator are ethnic, tribal or religious conflicts, conflicts which could have been avoided or resolved in time if a spirit of dialogue and tolerance had prevailed among the parties.

Before I conclude, I would like to recall some wise advice taken from a recent work by a man of great culture, Mr. Ghazi Algosaibi, the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to London. He observed that when one is presented with a conflict as being a shock between cultures one must show scepticism and analyse the question. Never lend credence to the myth of a homogeneous culture, according to Mr. Algosaibi, because even within the same religion there are many schools. Never generalize about a culture on the basis of individual experience. When one observes other cultures, one should look for similarities, rather than differences, with one's own culture. When one observes different types of behaviour in other cultures, one should look for the reasons. We are all the products of history and geography. We do things in a certain way because we are conditioned by the time and place in which we live. However, we do tend to make our own lifestyle a kind of norm, and we very often judge and criticize other cultures by the same yardstick. I will conclude where Mr. Algosaibi concluded, by asking everyone not to believe everything they read in books, magazines or newspapers about other cultures.

To illustrate this last point, Mr. Algosaibi cites the example of a student who concluded his university studies and went to Europe for the first time. He stopped in the beautiful city of Zurich. Shortly after his arrival there, a chambermaid in his hotel came to prepare his bed for him. The student immediately approached her and kissed her on the mouth. The chambermaid slapped him, which annoyed and surprised the student. He was annoyed and surprised by this unexpected reaction from the chambermaid precisely because, in all Western films that he had seen, women seemed to be ready to kiss men, and he thought that this was normal behaviour.

This example, albeit amusing, is terribly serious, because all stereotypes, throughout the world, are the result of inaccurate information or of deliberate disinformation. And, stereotypes persist. In order to do away with them we must act within our national programmes to promote the concept of dialogue among civilizations. We need to act on at least three fronts. We need to educate young people, particularly about intra- and inter-civilizational dialogue and the relationship between traditional values and modern values. We need to raise the consciousness of the media moguls about their central role in bringing civilizations closer together. We must see to it that all later initiatives mainstream the idea of tolerance and sharing the differences that enrich us.

In conclusion, dialogue among civilizations is possible and more than ever desirable at the dawn of the third millennium. To build an edifice of understanding among nations and peoples the United Nations is still, we feel, the ideal context for promoting, expanding and gaining acceptance for our diversity in the difference of our cultures, of our religions and of our traditions.

Let us therefore together, here and elsewhere, cultivate our values of human solidarity, our values of tolerance, our values of openness and dialogue and, as was advocated more than 40 years ago by the former President/poet of Senegal, Mr. Leopold Sedar Senghor: let us see to it that all of the fruitful elements of the values of our diverse civilizations come together at the banquet of our universal civilization.

**Mr. Samhan** (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to join previous speakers in welcoming the report of the Secretary-General, which contains extremely important proposals and suggestions on the agenda item concerning dialogue among civilizations. The General Assembly debate on this item coincides with the coming of the third millennium long awaited by our peoples in the hope of realizing our aspirations for human, cultural, social and economic development and the resolution of conflicts by peaceful means on the basis of the Charter and of respect for the sovereignty of international law. In today's world environment, the international community has been unable to settle a number of conflicts related to lasting peace, security and sustainable development. In light of this fact, the dialogue among civilizations is of particular importance as regards the interaction and participation required to solve these problems.

The United Arab Emirates firmly believes that civilizations with their diversity and unique development and features are the root of rules, principles ideologies and values for all States which have a rich past. This is true of the past and of the present. The permanence of those civilizations with their material, intellectual, spiritual and hereditary components, and their interaction with the environment out of which they grew, have produced a cultural heritage that characterizes different peoples and nations.

From this perspective, the United Arab Emirates has adopted Arab, Islamic civilization and Islamic law as its code of conduct. Islam considers man the representative of God on earth, where man must enshrine the principles of justice, peace, social responsibility and equal rights and duties. Islam enshrines these noble values for the sake of the transcendence of man. Man is a living pivot of interaction among civilizations in their different dimensions.

This spiritual and divine method is the root of legislation for consolidating right, justice and tolerance in a world where peace, security, stability and development must reign through spiritual and intellectual dialogue and communication. We must develop our cultural capital with strength and authenticity in order to achieve a civilization based on justice, knowledge and equality; a civilization that rejects aggression, occupation, ethnic and religious genocide and all forms and manifestations of international terrorism. This civilization must also promote tolerance, peaceful coexistence and consolidation of the culture of peace. It must build bridges of friendship and cooperation for the mutual benefit of all peoples and nations. This is where civilization has an essential role to play in the development of man and society. Civilization must protect the human characteristics and spiritual particularities in order to protect itself from disappearing. It must enrich the world and develop methodically irrespective of race, language, colour, religion, affiliation and so on.

God says in the Koran:

O mankind! We created
You from a single (pair)
Of a male and a female,
And made you into
Nations and tribes, that
Ye may know each other.
Verily, the most honoured of you
In the sight of Allah

> Is (he who is) the most
> Righteous of you. (*The Holy Koran, XLIX:13*)

The United Arab Emirates reaffirms the right of all States and peoples to preserve their cultural heritage, their civilization and religious beliefs. We firmly believe that cultural diversity is an essential and important component of the development and enrichment of the common cultural heritage of mankind and the thinking processes of man. These are the essential elements that brought humanity to the level of civilization we experience today.

We therefore support any efforts to enshrine a constructive, objective dialogue among as many civilizations and countries as possible in order to solve standing problems and to avoid all forms of aggression, ethnic or racial discrimination, conflict and occupation, any stockpiling of dangerous weapons, particularly nuclear weapons, and recourse to force or the threat of the use of force, particularly in times of conflict.

We restate the right of peoples to self-determination, the right to eliminate poverty and illness, the right to narrow the widening gap between developed and developing countries and the right to terminate all violations of human rights and pollution of the environment.

Finally, we believe that today's world is based on religious, intellectual and cultural diversity and mutual interests. This must not infringe on the national and regional sovereignty of States but should consolidate bilateral and multilateral relations among them, and should strengthen the principles of peaceful coexistence among peoples and respect for their historical and cultural heritage and achievements.

**Ms. Ibraimova** (Kyrgyzstan): Kyrgyzstan welcomes the idea of the dialogue among civilizations and highly appreciates the draft resolution prepared under the thorough attention paid by the Permanent Mission of Iran, which initiated and coordinated all the preparatory work.

Kyrgyzstan is one of the sponsors of the draft resolution, as it has a strong commitment to contribute to the efforts of the international community to live in a world enriched by the cultural, philosophical, spiritual and economic heritage and experience gained by all countries from East to West.

The idea of the dialogue among civilizations is followed by the doctrine of the Kyrgyz President, His Excellency Askar Akayev, entitled "Diplomacy of the Silk Road". The doctrine was distributed to all delegations as an official document of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly (A/53/396, annex). I want to recall that one of the main ideas of "Diplomacy of the Silk Road" was that

> "The renaissance of the Great Silk Road under the new historical circumstances refutes the ideas that were current in the past, which at times artificially contrasted the ways in which the East and the West perceived and viewed the world as totally incompatible with one another. Fortunately, ideas of planet-wide significance and scale are now predominant in the minds and hearts of the peoples inhabiting the region of the Road."

and that

> "The geography of the Great Silk Road has no bounds or limitations.
>
> "...
>
> "While in the past the Great Silk Road played the role of a connecting bridge, now, in a situation of globalization, the destiny of the Road extends far beyond the framework of this dimension alone."

Interdependence has become a completely new phenomenon of the end of the twentieth century. Globalization has led to an awareness of the unarguable fact that no country, however powerful it may be in military and economic terms, can face alone challenges such as the arms race, conflicts, extremism and terrorism, the illegal manufacture, distribution and consumption of narcotic substances, natural disasters and those brought about by man, and crying social needs that call into question the survival of the whole of mankind.

As one of the mechanisms to promote the dialogue among civilizations, Kyrgyzstan is ready and able to act as a binding link among all the Great Silk Road countries.

I would like to use this opportunity to stress that it is highly symbolic that the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations will be followed in 2002 by the International Year of Mountains. Mountains and highlands make up more than a quarter of the Earth's land surface and are home to about 10 per cent of its population. Therefore all the problems, values and mentality of the peoples living

in mountainous areas are common, irrespective of which part of the world those mountains are found. The idea of the dialogue among civilizations is therefore continued into the Year of Mountains on the basis of the belief that human beings and nations can build a better world through peaceful discourse, mutually beneficial interactions and the definition of common values.

**Mr. Hasan** (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): The progress made by mankind is the outcome of the achievements of peoples since the dawn of history: from the civilizations of Mesopotamia to the Phoenician and Egyptian civilizations and those of India, China and Latin America, including the Arab Islamic civilization, the European Renaissance and, finally, the information revolution and the conquest of outer space. As civilization is the common heritage of all mankind, it must cope with the challenges of the present and the future in a concerted manner.

My country, Iraq, is proud that it was the cradle of ancient civilizations — the Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian and Assyrian. The creativity of Iraq continued and attained its apogee when Baghdad became the capital of the Arab Islamic State, whose achievements in science, the arts and literature were a bridge of creativity between ancient civilizations and modern times. This has helped mankind in its present achievements. Arab Islamic civilization concretized the concepts of dialogue among civilizations, tolerance and balance between the spiritual and material needs of mankind. The Arab nation is capable of continuing its historic mission by taking an active part in creating mankind's civilization.

In this century, mankind has seen destructive conflicts whose roots go back to hegemony, evil tendencies, aggression, racism, colonialism, illusions of racial supremacy, the arms race, economic disparity and the illegal use of force. As we approach the third millennium, the international community must put a stop to these destructive tendencies and seek common ground among peoples and nations. We believe that the main means of bringing about such a change is to activate dialogue among civilizations in order to lay the foundations of a new world order on the basis of the rule of law and respect for the cultural diversity of nations, so as to guarantee social, economic and political progress for everyone.

In order to move towards that goal, States must establish and implement cultural, educational, social and informational programmes to strengthen the concept of dialogue among civilizations and to consolidate human values. This should be done, first, by respecting equality among all peoples and States; secondly, by accepting cultural and intellectual diversity as a permanent feature of human society; thirdly, by fostering mutual respect and tolerance between civilizations and the preservation of the cultural and spiritual values and heritage of all civilizations; fourthly, by rejecting hegemony and domination of one culture over another; and fifthly, by cooperating to put an end to the dangers posed to international peace and security, such as hegemonistic political and economic tendencies, aggression, the arms race and the degradation of the environment.

We need to take the cultural dimension and respect for humankind's cultural and spiritual values as our basis. This is the best way to overcome the arrogance of power, predominance of materialism and non-respect for peoples.

If we wish to build a culture based on human civilization and achievements, we cannot then have the Foreign Minister of some super-Power boast that the sanctions imposed in the name of the United Nations have killed 500,000 innocent Iraqi children. Nor would we be witnessing this terrible situation where a minority of northern countries lives in abundance whereas a billion people are dying of hunger in the South, or where a minority of countries possesses nuclear weapons that can destroy the whole world several times over and uses these weapons to threaten and blackmail other peoples.

In conclusion, we must reaffirm the pivotal role of the United Nations in preparing and implementing cultural, social and educational programmes to consolidate this idea of dialogue among civilizations, with a view to creating a model for international relations based on integration, not exclusion, and on a culture of peace based on justice, equality, freedom, democracy, respect for human rights and development.

**Mr. Jasmi** (Malaysia): My delegation is pleased to note that the initiative calling for a dialogue among civilizations has received tremendous support from various quarters ever since the Islamic Republic of Iran first mooted it in the Assembly. It is a commendable initiative which my delegation and many others have wholeheartedly supported. It is also timely: as humanity stands on the threshold of the new millennium, a fruitful dialogue among civilizations would be a major contribution to promoting a culture of understanding and tolerance among humankind which hopefully would characterize at least the next century, if not the next millennium.

Ibn Khaldun, the illustrious fourteenth century Muslim historian and political scientist, in his pioneering work, *The Muqaddimah*, has pointed out that cultures and civilizations cannot exist without depending upon other cultures and civilizations. He believed that humankind is fundamentally social in character and that human societies are invariably dependent upon other societies as a source of alternative ideas, values and knowledge, and, of course, for trade. It is this dynamic of contact, exchange and interaction that keeps the vital pulse of any culture or civilization alive, as otherwise it will go through a process of stagnation and decay.

In the contemporary world the process of globalization has brought about greater interaction between nations and civilizations. While this process may yield a lot of positive results, there is also the potential for cross-civilizational misunderstanding or even conflict, and there is ample evidence of this — hence the imperative need for the international community to formulate appropriate strategies and programmes aimed at greater intercivilizational dialogue and understanding.

We need to revitalize those attitudes, which Ibn Khaldun himself regarded as the most crucial for the development of a dynamic and healthy civilization. This includes the need to be honest and critical about one's own cultural tradition and civilization, the need to remain open towards other alternative cultural viewpoints, and the need to emphasize the importance of a just and equitable relationship between civilizational and cultural groupings. It is only through the inculcation of these attitudes and their application that we can dispel the myth of cultural exclusivity and superiority.

At the same time, we need to intensify the struggle for justice, fairness and equality within the world order itself, for without them the non-dominant nations and civilizations will continue to be marginalized, making it difficult for them to voice their concerns and aspirations, let alone promote their legitimate agendas. This would naturally create a sense of frustration among sections of the global community, which would not be conducive to dialogue and harmony among nations and civilizations.

We believe that only through frank and sincere dialogue will we be able to foster mutual understanding, appreciation and respect among nations and civilizations. In this regard, my delegation is gratified that the Islamic countries have already embarked on a journey to promote dialogue among various cultures and civilizations with the adoption of the Teheran Declaration on Dialogue among Civilizations by the member States of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) on 5 May 1999.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the continuous efforts being made by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the OIC secretariat in promoting this initiative at the international level. My delegation would like to reaffirm our support for the Teheran Declaration, which contains constructive proposals for the advancement of this initiative. We hope that other countries will do likewise. We would also like to congratulate the organizers of the recent seminar on "Dialogue among Civilizations", which was held here just recently, on the success of the seminar, which enjoyed an overwhelming response and support from Member States.

It is sad that despite the tremendous achievements of human civilizations, humanity has not been able to overcome the age-old problems of human conflicts, which continue to rage in many parts of the world, claiming so many lives and squandering so many of our scarce resources. Surely we and future generations of humanity cannot be content to accept this state of affairs as an inescapable fact of the human condition. Surely, with the increased level of our sophistication — intellectual and material — humanity should be able to effect a paradigm shift in our handling of the conflicts that have plagued our planet, moving from recourse to the use of arms in the settlement of conflict to a path of dialogue, understanding and conciliation.

In this regard, we believe the media has an important role to play. Instead of indulging in typical sensationalism and pandering to popular prejudices, which feeds on people's latent suspicions, fears and hatreds, the media should act more responsibly, conscious of the knowledge that what they put out has an enormous impact on the population at large. It should be guided by the need for objectivity and should refrain from the easy and careless stereotyping of peoples and behaviour to pander to the popular need to find scapegoats for every act of violence that occurs. It is regrettable that Muslims in particular have been the target of such stereotyping by the media, which does great harm to the cause of greater understanding between nations and civilizations.

In the complex, interdependent world of today, we cannot afford to have a clash of civilizations. Rather, we should endeavour to learn and absorb the good values of each other's civilizations. We should attempt a synthesis

of our best thoughts and ideas and synergize our efforts towards the goal of creating better understanding among humankind based on increased tolerance in an increasingly multicultural world, thereby guaranteeing a joyous celebration, instead of a clash, of civilizations.

As a multiracial, multireligious and multicultural nation, Malaysia fully understands and appreciates the paramount importance of harnessing cross-cultural understanding in its efforts at nation-building since its independence in 1957. Through the process of communal dialogue and the practice of tolerance, Malaysians have been able to live in harmony, goodwill and peace. The country has, in fact, benefited from the fusion of civilizations by harnessing the cultural variety and richness of the various races that make up Malaysia. We truly believe that there can be unity in diversity. Indeed, as a model of multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-civilizational, yet united, nations, we are happy to share with others the experience we have accumulated during the 42 years we have existed as a nation.

My delegation believes that the United Nations can and should play a pivotal role in developing and promoting dialogue among civilizations. Through dialogue, a new, universal set of values or norms could be evolved that would form the basis for creating better understanding among nations. We believe that this Assembly and the other United Nations organs and agencies, especially the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, could all contribute to inculcating increased awareness of, and sensitivity towards, civilizational differences and take due cognizance of them in formulating their work programmes and strategies.

In this connection, my delegation welcomes the recent appointment of Mr. Giandomenico Picco as the Secretary-General's Personal Representative for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. We trust that with his vast experience and knowledge, Mr. Picco will be able to accomplish the task of making the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations in 2001 a successful and memorable one.

The new millennium ought to be different from past millenniums of human history, which have been characterized by wars and conflicts arising out of misunderstanding, bigotry and intolerance as much as of sheer competition for hegemony and resources. As the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mr. Mahathir Mohamad, wrote in his recent book, *A New Deal for Asia*:

> "a World Century is now possible for the first time. No single nation, no single people and no single region should inherit the future; all nations, all people, all regions should have the same opportunities. I hope that all people of talent and diligence, who earn the right, will inherit the future. I believe the future should belong to all who have the will and who are willing to put in the effort. Globalization, yes; but hegemonic uniformity and conformity, no. Material wealth enough for all to enjoy, yes; but the rule of money in all affairs and all corners of the world, no."

For such a "world century" to materialize, there is a need for a fundamental reorientation of our thinking, approaches and strategies — a paradigm shift that will draw on the best and most positive attributes of humanity. We sincerely believe that this initiative by the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is now being supported by this Assembly, is a major contribution to bringing about this shift.

**Mr. Wenaweser** (Liechtenstein): The initiative for a dialogue among civilizations, launched by the Islamic Republic of Iran, is in our view one of the most interesting and promising projects under consideration by the General Assembly. Liechtenstein has thus joined the sponsors of draft resolution A/54/L.60, which will be adopted later today.

The United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations is approaching, and a lot of work remains to be done if we are to fully explore the rich potential of the topic for the benefit of peoples and individuals worldwide, as well as for our daily work at the United Nations. We welcome the appointment of Mr. Giandomenico Picco as Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, as well as the contributions made by the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and many others. Liechtenstein has a strong interest in the future work on this issue, and in this debate we would like to offer just a few thoughts of a general nature.

Clearly, both conceptually and linguistically, the idea of a dialogue among civilizations was born out of a reaction to the famous theory of a "clash of civilizations", which was proposed as a new paradigm after the end of the cold war. It is meant to provide a counterbalance to a controversial and rather pessimistic view of the prevailing worldwide dynamics in world

affairs. There can be no doubt that the United Nations is the perfect forum to stage such a dialogue: the Charter of the United Nations starts with the words "We the peoples", and goes on to talk about practising tolerance and living in peace with one another. The creation of the United Nations itself was probably the most prominent result of a successful dialogue among nations and also, therefore, of civilizations. This Organization is thus the natural framework for establishing this dialogue.

As the provisional report of the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General observes, there is no agreed definition of the word "civilization". We would agree with his conclusion that embarking on a definitional debate within the United Nations could easily prove counterproductive, but it is certainly worth looking into some of the elements which constitute a civilization, if only to establish which notion the word "civilization" should not bear. We would like to make some comments on this question.

"Civilization" cannot mean a developmentally, morally, technologically or otherwise more "advanced" stage — more advanced, by necessity, in relation to other cultural entities. Such an understanding stems from obsolete concepts, but it is still encountered here and there. It would, of course, defeat the purpose and the foundation of a dialogue among civilizations right from the beginning.

It is important to recognize that, far from being a final product of a historic development, a civilization is constantly evolving, adapting and changing; it is a process, rather than a product. It is this very quality that ensures its survival and development. It is also this very quality which makes the proposed dialogue among civilizations such a necessity of logic and a potential source of inspiration for all civilizations. Speaking more concretely, and from our own perspective, there is such a thing as a Western civilization, and there was such a thing 100 years ago. While it would be hard to say which are the constituent elements of this, our civilization, it is quite safe to say that they are not identical to those of 100 years ago.

An indispensable element of fruitful and genuine dialogue among civilizations is the inclusion and active participation of a very wide range of actors who effectively and on a daily basis play a part in the issue at hand. Governments and their policies are mostly, and to varying degrees, expressions of civilizations, but they certainly do not represent them. The past few years have witnessed an enhanced involvement and an increased role of civil society in United Nations matters. In general, however, we continue to rely heavily on the routine of intergovernmental processes, which admittedly is necessary for many United Nations activities.

With regard to the proposed dialogue among civilizations, however, a true quantum leap will be necessary to allow the full exploration of its potential. The main activities with regard to the dialogue should take place outside of the intergovernmental framework, while we, as Governments, have the task of providing a forum for such a dialogue and of giving a voice to those with something to say.

"Dialogue" originally meant talking back and forth. Listening and talking are thus of equal importance -- or giving and taking, since language, written or spoken, is not the only means of communication and thus of dialogue. A dialogue consists of the willingness and ability to give and offer and of the open-mindedness to receive and integrate. This flow in both directions, this interaction, is perhaps the most significant characteristic of a dialogue.

The prerequisite for genuine dialogue is thus that the parties involved should regard one another with full respect and as being on the same level. Recognition of diversity must not establish a hierarchy, but should instead serve as a basis for the establishment of possible common ground, a common language.

There seems to be broad agreement on the existence of a relationship between globalization and a dialogue among civilizations, but less so on the nature of that relationship. Many have said that globalization facilitates such a dialogue; others have put more emphasis on the need for such a dialogue in the face of the perceived threat of globalization. As in all discussions on globalization, there is a clear technological dimension. Modern technology has intensified and promoted inter-cultural exchange largely unimpeded and at unprecedented speed. Nobody will contest the enormous inherent potential of these technologies for people worldwide, but scepticism and caution have also been expressed. The technologies in question are relatively recent, and their overall impact on the very nature and core of communication is not yet clear.

Globalization itself has already become a controversial concept and an emotionally charged term. Many of the fears and concerns expressed are very real and legitimate, and they need to be addressed. This, however, cannot be done through denial of the reality

that globalization exists, but rather through concerted and joint efforts to make it beneficial for the largest possible number of people worldwide.

The dialogue among civilizations could be a perfect vehicle for such efforts. The relationship between globalization and a dialogue among civilizations is a circular or mutually sustaining one. The technologies which are characteristic and indispensable elements of globalization can greatly facilitate the dialogue among civilizations, which in turn can contribute to shaping the forces of globalization in a culturally sound and sustainable manner.

The need for and usefulness of the proposed dialogue seem obvious, and there are clearly numerous promising ways of holding it. It is legitimate and important to ask what the goal of such a dialogue can or should be, as has been done by the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General and by others. Given the particular nature of such a dialogue and the great variety of participants in it, it seems important to keep an open and flexible mind on the question of a possible outcome, while setting out certain basic elements, in particular the importance of identifying, developing and strengthening common ground among civilizations. Promotion of tolerance and mutual understanding, enhanced readiness to learn from one another, and acceptance of differences: all these are elements of identifying new and consolidating existing common ground. From the United Nations perspective, it is most notably the Charter itself and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which constitute such common ground.

The importance of such common ground has been emphasized both by the Personal Representative and in the Teheran Declaration on Dialogue among Civilizations adopted by the Organization of the Islamic Conference. It is worth emphasizing too that the process of dialogue is a goal in itself, and that the quality of the dialogue taking place is the best yardstick for measuring its success and impact. Among the most famous dialogues in literature, after all, are the ones by Plato, in which Socrates and his interlocutors engage in attempts to define certain commonly used terms and invariably come to the conclusion that they seem not to understand the meaning of terms they use on a daily basis. The dialogue leading to that conclusion, however, constitutes such a learning process that both the participants and the reader feel enriched and inspired by the exchange, without having achieved what they originally set out to do.

The other obvious goal of a dialogue among civilizations is to prove that the predicted clash of civilizations is by no means a necessity and by no means inherent in the relationship among civilizations. This entails the prevention of conflicts, in particular armed conflicts, and is thus a very ambitious goal indeed which requires a pervasive culture of dialogue on all levels of our societies and within civilizations themselves.

The initiative before us gives us, as Governments, a unique opportunity to promote and facilitate such a dialogue, indeed to create the conditions under which it can take place.

**Mr. Minoves-Triquell** (Andorra) (*spoke in Spanish*): This may be the most appropriate forum in which to have a conversation and to share our views on what we mean when we say "dialogue among civilizations", simply because we talk to one another every day and have done so regularly in all the conference rooms of this Organization since its creation, and because in this Hall are gathered the representatives of most of the world's countries, who represent nations with many different cultures, histories, languages and traditions.

Let me begin by discussing the meaning of the word "dialogue". The various definitions agree that dialogue is the activity of transmitting thoughts and opinions, in writing or orally, to someone who is listening, understanding, reasoning and replying. All of these are important elements of a dialogue; without them, the dialogue would be imperfect or impossible. But the individual may be the most important element in ensuring that a dialogue is constructive. The individual can be a member of the same family, neighbourhood, city, region or country, or of a different nationality. And it is after all individuals who make up societies, nations and, ultimately, civilizations.

By "civilization", we mean an advanced level of intellectual, cultural and material development within a human society, featuring progress in the arts and sciences, the common use of writing and the emergence of complex political and social institutions. We distinguish and label as civilizations those which, because of their singularity, represent specific aspects of that society. Civilizations have appeared and disappeared throughout the years; they have been and are in continuous transformation, always leaving, when they have passed, vestiges of their existence. It is precisely

this that we are here today to speak about, to understand and, as far as possible, to evaluate.

(*spoke in French*)

The Principality of Andorra has always been a crossroads and melting pot for peoples. Many civilizations have encountered one another in the Pyrenees: Basques, Celts, Iberians, the tribes of Andosinos, Gauls, Romans, Arabs and Goths, and so many other people who have found refuge in our valley. This is nothing exceptional; this is the history of the world. Most of the cultures represented by our countries here today in the General Assembly are themselves an outcome of an historical dialogue between many cultures and civilizations. In my country, a haven of peace for seven hundred years, ideological enemies have coexisted in times of war. We understand the meaning of the word "dialogue", and we are convinced that this is the path of the future.

When different civilizations meet, with their heritage of different ideas and interests, conflicts arise. This is the basis of war. The United Nations must manage to become the forum where dialogue is possible as an alternative. This is where, aided by the principles of respect for human rights and freedom, which unites humankind, that common denominator can become the seed of understanding among peoples.

"Globalization" is in every mouth as this century ends. The representative of Liechtenstein just mentioned it. Globalization is indeed a fact at the economic and cultural level. We must rise to the challenge of protecting our cultural, linguistic and religious identities and various civilizations while promoting convergence on the basis of values common to all mankind, and I repeat, human rights and freedom. Whoever speaks of freedom speaks of democracy.

Andorra cares deeply about this, and often it has shown its desire for seeking linkages among civilizations. It is enough to quote the first paragraph of the preamble to the Statute of the International Criminal Court drafted by my country at the Rome conference:

(*spoke in English*)

> "The States Parties to this Statute, conscious that all peoples are united by common bonds, their cultures pieced together in a shared heritage, and concerned that this delicate mosaic may be shattered at any time".

When one speaks of civilizations, one should also remember that especially after this century of accrued globalization and unprecedented progress, different generations of people of the same civilization are sometimes at odds, since the values they cherish and the heritage they relate to might not be the same. I would like to invite my colleagues to give thought to this paradox in the framework of the 1995 Commitments of the Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development, elaborated by my country, from which I quote:

> "We will ... acknowledge and encourage the contribution of people of all age groups as equally and vitally important for the building of a harmonious society, and foster dialogue between generations in all parts of society".

(*spoke in Spanish*)

The dialogue among us here in this Hall or elsewhere, in the same language or in different ones, should enable us to overcome differences of opinion that are obstacles to our progress. Any peaceful settlement of an international conflict must start by means of dialogue if it is to succeed. If there is no dialogue, preventive diplomacy will remain fruitless and, probably, wars will recur indefinitely.

On the threshold of a new millennium, let us give dialogue its full worth so that all of us together may advance on the path of progress and peace. For all these reasons, my country today wishes to co-sponsor draft resolution A/54/L.60 in introduced by Iran.

**Mr. Moushoutas** (Cyprus): Cyprus expresses deep appreciation and commends the delegation of Iran for having inscribed the item on dialogue among civilizations on the agenda of the General Assembly. Considering the state of world affairs, the historic juncture at which mankind finds itself and the fact that in recent years most conflicts used the threat of diversity as justification for conflict, the timing for consideration of this item could not have been more opportune.

A new millennium is dawning. We are on the threshold of a new set of a thousand years of what is expected to be unprecedented technological advance and interdependence, where every action and inaction and every human interchange will be more than ever globalized, instantly radiating its impact to the four corners of the Earth.

Our world, in a way, is getting smaller, and distances seem to be of no consequence. We are becoming a global village, a minuscule part of the infinite. As such, it would be expected that, like water running to water, we would draw closer together, man closer to his fellow man and nations closer to nations, accepting and appreciating our diversity and pluralism, the "harmony in difference" mentioned in UNESCO's Declaration of Principles on Tolerance.

Instead, we are witnessing an ominous anachronism, a contradiction, where separatism, division, partition and segregation are pursued and at times rewarded, instead of unity, integration and cooperation. These separatist trends, especially when militant, form the root causes of internal strife and can pose threats to regional and even international peace and security.

The provisional report on the subject by the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations stated that the majority of recent conflicts where United Nations peacekeeping operations take place are based on ethnic, tribal, or religious grounds. Mr. Giandomenico Picco, the wise and learned Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, stresses the need to promote an understanding in dealing with the root causes of conflicts, and he adds what I consider to be the gist of the subject matter:

> "Just as, during the 1990s, many who went to war used the threat of diversity as justification for conflict, perhaps in the future those who seek peace will use the spirit of dialogue among civilizations as a means to move forward." (A/54/546, annex, para. 14)

Promoting understanding, tolerance and cooperation through dialogue is not only an ideal policy, it is also the choice for survival. Since we have experienced so much destruction and human misery in the present millennium, common sense dictates that we should avoid the calamities and the horrors of wars that we have brought upon us in the past, and that peace and cooperation should replace confrontations and wars.

The Charter of the United Nations, the General Assembly resolution on the culture of tolerance and the Declaration on a Culture of Peace consider dialogue the *sine qua non* for harmonizing human relations. We consider, therefore, the initiative of the President of Islamic Republic of Iran, Seyed Mohammad Khatami, wise and visionary. It seeks to institutionalize dialogue among peoples of different cultures and civilizations, accepting and appreciating the diversity and the beauty of difference in culture.

There is a need to inform people of the benefits of cultural pluralism and of how civilizations can be enriched by one another. There is also a need to address concerns that portray specific religions and cultures as threats to peace and coexistence. Our survival ultimately will depend on our success at promoting dialogue as the accepted mode of behaviour for settling differences and disputes in accordance with the United Nations Charter.

My Government is committed to solving the problem of Cyprus through dialogue. As a matter of fact, such a dialogue is presently under way at United Nations Headquarters. This is an example of our adherence to the spirit of dialogue and to the Charter. We are striving for a peaceful solution, so that the two communities may again live in peace and harmony, as they have done for centuries in the past.

It is with these thoughts in mind that we have co-sponsored this year's draft resolution, A/54/L.60, and that we, along with other Member States, will participate in making the year 2001 the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations.

**Mr. Al-Hajri** (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am pleased to make this statement on behalf of the Arab Group, which my delegation is chairing this month, on the agenda item entitled "Dialogue among civilizations". Allow me to extend our sincere thanks to the Secretary-General for the report in A/54/546. This report includes an outline of how the Secretary-General intends to respond to the invitation from the General Assembly to reflect on the idea of "dialogue among civilizations".

The debate on this agenda item does not only focus on the importance of dialogue among civilizations — which was highlighted in numerous statements by delegations during the general debate of the current Assembly session — but also emphasizes the firm intention of the international community to enter the third millennium following the approach outlined in General Assembly resolution 53/22 of 4 November 1998, entitled the "United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations".

In the preambular paragraphs of that resolution the Assembly reaffirmed the purposes and principles embodied in the Charter of the United Nations, *inter alia*, "promoting and encouraging universal respect for human

rights and fundamental freedoms for all". The resolution recognized the "diverse civilizational achievements of mankind, crystallizing cultural pluralism and creative human diversity", and by it the Assembly also reaffirmed that "civilizational achievements constitute the collective heritage of mankind".

The Arab States have followed with great interest the meetings held in 1998 and 1999 that yielded the following results: the Declaration of Athens, entitled "The heritage of ancient civilizations: Implications for the modern world", which is contained in A/54/60; and the Teheran Declaration on Dialogue among Civilizations, which was adopted by the Islamic Symposium on Dialogue among Civilizations and is contained in document A/54/116. In addition, the Arab States followed the panel discussions on dialogue among civilizations held at United Nations Headquarters in May and November 1999.

The member States of the League of Arab States would like to call attention to the Arab position vis-à-vis the dialogue among civilizations. This position contains the following provisions. First, Arab States believe in the dialogue among civilizations and reject the idea of the clash of civilizations. Secondly, the Arab-Islamic civilization played a pioneering role in enriching human culture, in particular through its accomplishments in the fields of arts and sciences, accomplishments that built bridges of creativity linking ancient civilization to the modern age and that brought humanity to the point where it could make its current achievements, which are its common heritage. Thirdly, the challenges posed by globalization in our time are mainly based on the tyranny of power, the failure to acknowledge others and the attempt to subjugate them, thus endangering national identity and the specific cultural characteristics of nations. Fourthly, in order to avoid these risks, the dialogue among civilizations must be based on a composite concept made up of equality, justice, diversity and peace. Fifthly, the dialogue among civilizations needs to be based on a culture of peace which is itself founded on justice and tolerance.

And sixthly, in order to achieve true dialogue, tolerance and peace, three tenets must be respected. The first is that just as peace must be established in all parts of the world, foreign occupation and hegemony must be terminated and the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of States must be respected, as should the principle of non-interference in States' internal affairs. There can be no tolerance alongside occupation and aggression. The second tenet is the imperative need to remove the obstacles that impede the realization of the right of peoples to self-determination. The third tenet is the inadmissibility of the use or threat of use of force, or of the acquisition of the territories of others by means of war.

In conclusion, I would like to assure the General Assembly that the Arabs' choice of peace as a strategic option is proof of their credibility in adopting dialogue among civilizations and the culture of peace as a slogan for their struggle to achieve a permanent, just, comprehensive and peaceful settlement of the situation of the Middle East, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy. I would also like to emphasize the important role of the United Nations in educating the peoples of the world about the dialogue among civilizations in conformity with the noble purposes and principles of the United Nation Charter.

**Ms. Korpi** (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union on agenda item 34, entitled "Dialogue among civilizations". The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated countries Cyprus and Malta, as well as the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries members of the European Economic Area (EEA), Iceland and Norway, align themselves with this statement.

Our present generation is experiencing an unprecedented growth of affordable information technology, which is bringing all cultural spheres around the world into daily contact with each other at all levels of society. The ongoing process of globalization entails an intensified intercultural interchange. The rapid growth of opportunities for communication presents a tremendous challenge to us to increase our ability to understand and make ourselves understood. All societies essentially continue to approach communication from their own cultural heritage, determined by such features as language, behavioural conventions, customs, cultural traditions, experiences and beliefs.

The existing ethical and legal ground that the world community shares as a whole is also ample. Against that background, an international dialogue can be an enriching experience and helps develop understanding of the values that are inherent in humanity and common to all civilizations. The United Nations itself has done a great deal to establish a culture of dialogue and the world

community has repeatedly demonstrated its commitment to a shared existing ethical foundation.

As we all know, there exists no accepted definition of what constitutes a civilization — a fact that is also mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General. The European Union voices caution towards a stereotyped and limiting concept what constitutes a civilization. Indeed, we propose to use a wide concept to accommodate the varying conditions under which people belonging to different cultures, beliefs, nations and indigenous peoples and ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities, as well as immigrant and refugee communities, meet in dialogue and interact. Dialogue among and within countries, nations, cultures and religions is, in its most diverse sense, an excellent way to promote pluralism, tolerance and the participation of civil society in processes of governance.

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Humankind has, through the course of history, developed its ethical traditions convinced that humans are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. The United Nations, in the aftermath of the two catastrophic World Wars, built on that in a search for common moral and ethical values when it undertook, in a major effort of international dialogue, to codify universal legal norms corresponding to the universal rights deriving from the inherent dignity of the human person. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights grew out of a recognition of these values. It was a codification of the existing fundamental values of all peoples, as again confirmed in the Proclamation of Teheran, in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and again, one year ago, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration.

The Year 2001 has been designated the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. The European Union welcomes the fact that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has reacted positively to the request of the General Assembly that it make a major contribution to the preparations for the Year and that it has already started to take concrete initiatives in this regard. Further, the European Union notes with satisfaction the appointment of Mr. Giandomenico Picco as Personal Representative of the Secretary-General and looks forward to entering into a dialogue with him on these issues.

In the same spirit, the European Union welcomes the interest shown so far by Governments and international organizations in the preparations for the international Year. The European Union has contributed by providing its own views on the subject, including in response to a note by the Secretariat a few months ago. We note that the draft resolution which we will adopt today makes specific reference to the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which has also proven itself active on this subject. The intention of the European Union is, no doubt like that of many Member States and groups of States — whether mentioned or not in the draft resolution — to continue to take interest in the preparations for the Year and to contribute to its success.

In our view, the wide range of existing instruments adopted in the United Nations system concerning tolerance, human rights, cultural cooperation, science and education constitute a solid normative basis for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. We do not need new international instruments or long processes of intergovernmental negotiations. We need practical action to bring people together, including through the use of modern methods of communication.

The United Nations has, from its inception, provided a forum for dialogue primarily among Governments. While the European Union supports the further development of the intergovernmental dialogue in the United Nations system, we would be disappointed if the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations were also eventually to fall primarily into this genre. Governments have the responsibility to represent the public interests of their citizens, but can hardly be expected to represent, in any meaningful way in a civilizational dialogue, the whole diversity of views and values held by all communities resident under their jurisdiction.

In the past, thematic years proclaimed by the United Nations have inspired governmental institutions and non-governmental organizations to focus on the theme at hand and it is to be expected that a year of dialogue among civilizations will induce similar activity. The United Nations must find ways and means to be instrumental in promoting and stimulating an increased civilizational dialogue. As the United Nations remains a forum primarily for Governments, and while some activities could be foreseen at United Nations Headquarters in close interaction with civil society, the mainstream of activities should be with civil society and subsequently take place at the local level and in the context of appropriate institutional partnerships. The Governments have a role to play, inasmuch as the intergovernmental processes of dialogue among civilizations should provide an

opportunity for practical ways of facilitating interchange among ordinary people.

Within the European Union existing institutions already contribute to an ongoing informal dialogue at all levels. Education, whether formal or informal, can provide information and can cultivate an open attitude, thereby offering members of society insight into the lives and ideals of other nations and civilizations. Academic programmes support research in this field. Non-governmental organizations devoted to developments abroad are highly active in publicizing characteristics of civilizations. Exchange programmes and travelling opportunities enable people to acquire first hand experience. The European Union supports a variety of similar activities involving interchange among civil society extending beyond the European Union.

In this connection, the European Union recalls its interest in the upcoming World Conference against Racism and Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, to be held in the year 2001. The preparation for and follow-up to this Conference will be pursued within an international, regional and national framework. Non-governmental organizations will give their own distinct contribution at the World Conference, as well as throughout the whole preparatory and follow-up processes at all levels. The European preparations for the World Conference against Racism and Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance are being conducted by the Council of Europe. The process will culminate in the European conference under the title "All different, all equal: from principle to practice" in October 2000 in Strasbourg. The European Union is committed to participating actively.

In conclusion, for Europe, multi-ethnic and multicultural diversity and interaction have created an enormously rich heritage, but they have also generated conflicts. The countries which today form the European Union are aware, from their own experience, that the only way peace and stability can thrive is through democracy, pluralism and human rights in open and tolerant societies. Therefore, we are committed to promoting international cooperation, democracy, the rule of law and human rights in the global context as well.

**Mr. Fruchtbaum** (Solomon Islands): When the delegate of Solomon Islands spoke from this rostrum 13 months ago in support of the draft resolution introduced by Iran, designating the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, he posed a number of questions to suggest the intellectual and practical difficulties of the proposed undertaking. He asked: How are civilizations to be defined for the Year of Dialogue? What recognition is to be given to those cultures and civilizations that comprise larger ones? What, in fact, is the relationship between culture and civilization?

Although these questions are not answered in the thoughtful analysis of Giandomenico Picco, the Secretary-General's Personal Representative for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, in the annex to the report of the Secretary-General (A/54/546) now before us, we are thankful to Mr. Picco for taking on his difficult assignment. In his well-crafted text, he again demonstrates the courage for which he has been widely acclaimed.

> "While all of these questions may be justified and useful, the United Nations may not be the appropriate forum in which to examine them",

he writes, as if addressing the Solomon Islands delegate. He continues:

> "Indeed, such discussions can open the door to political and cultural misunderstandings that could ultimately lead in the opposite direction from that which the General Assembly membership surely had in mind when it unanimously adopted resolution 53/22."

He calls for the pursuit of a different approach, for:

> "The last 10 years have proven that what is needed is a dialogue which can be both preventive — when possible — and inclusive in nature".

Rejecting the idea offered by some that recent and current conflicts represent a clash of civilizations, cultures or religions, Mr. Picco contrasts the perception that "diversity poses a threat" with "the acceptance of the enormous value of diversity and the fact that diversity is the beginning of growth", concepts he places at the core of the United Nations. He sees this discussion as providing "an opportunity to rediscover the fundamental values on which our Organization was solidly founded." He writes that

> "The establishment of the United Nations was intended to provide a paradigm of international relations based on inclusion rather than exclusion."

Whether that was actually the intent and how well it was fulfilled throughout the history of the Organization need not be debated here. We can accept the general spirit of Mr. Picco's observation.

Where he goes next, however, raises for my delegation vexing questions. He writes:

> "It seems appropriate, therefore, to speak, within the United Nations context, of two sets of civilizations: those that perceive diversity as a threat and those that perceive diversity as an integral component of growth. The dialogue should be between these two civilizations or set of civilizations".

My delegation asks, who will place his or her country or culture or civilization in the group that sees diversity as a threat? In the United Nations, will not speaking about two civilizations, in Mr. Picco's words, "open the door to political and cultural misunderstandings"?

Do we really have a set of two civilizations, or rather a spectrum of values and interpretations? Even where diversity is seen as an integral component of growth, is there a limit to how much diversity a culture or civilization, or for that matter, a nation can live with successfully? How is that limit determined, and by whom? Is there any role for the international community in the determination, and if so, what should it be? Are we overlooking the value of other cultures' values, including those of indigenous peoples? Recent and current events painfully demonstrate that these are not questions to be dismissed as invitations to engage in academic acrobatics.

Mr. Picco points out that dialogue was invented long ago and it exists "even where war rages and conflict has created seemingly insurmountable borders between people". We agree and, with him, believe that we need to identify and listen to "those indomitable human beings who have been able to see through the alleged diversity of their neighbours and keep alive the flame of humanity". For, as Mr. Picco writes, their example "is surely the most effective means of teaching and preaching dialogue".

In many ways, as he shows, the Member States have taken steps to foster dialogue, recently for example, through the United Nations Year for Tolerance and the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance, as well as the International Year for the Culture of Peace and the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World.

Much of the diplomatic work we do here, in fact, involves dialogue with people from other civilizations, cultures, religions, ethnic groups and, of course, nations. It is true, as Mr. Picco writes, that "The membership of the United Nations shares a set of common values, as reflected in the Charter." One may add to this the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and a long list of international conventions. The question is how these values are interpreted and used.

> "The expansion of that common denominator of values would, by definition, facilitate dialogue, as Member States would share more and more common principles",

writes Mr. Picco. That "common denominator of values", however, needs to be delineated. But will a consensus on what it is be possible in the near future? All of us can testify from our experience in various committees and working groups here how frustratingly difficult, and at times impossible, it is to reach agreement on some things where even the smallest expansion of values is required or implied. Mr. Picco observes that "Some may fear that such an expansion could lead to the domination of the strong", but

> "In this regard, the United Nations can play a significant role by seeking to ensure that, in the process of expansion, identities are preserved."

How is the United Nations to do this successfully in an era when so much is in flux, when cultures and nations are facing powerful forces for change, and dialogue is being sought — even demanded?

The analysis by Mr. Picco ends with his insight that "Human history continuously develops by carrying out two apparently contradictory trends: integration and local identities". Both trends, he notes, "have appeared hand in hand in many parts of the world during the last 30 years".

From this evidence, Mr. Picco concludes that "the expansion of common values and the strengthening of identities are not contradictory". He says

> "The message of diversity, as it relates to the United Nations system, can serve as a tool to protect distinct identities, as the common denominator of values which bring us all together expands."

Moreover, he goes on,

> "The greater the appreciation of diversity, the deeper the sense of identity and the sounder the enlargement of the common denominator of values. These developments will, in turn, strengthen the United Nations system."

The Solomon Islands delegation asks how these developments are to be fostered, especially in view of the fact that the Secretary-General introduces Mr. Picco's analysis by noting the breadth of the concept of dialogue among civilizations, the lack of financial resources and the need for funding from outside the United Nations to support sharply focused projects that may be proposed.

Certainly, the work of Mr. Picco on behalf of the Secretary-General and the future efforts of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and other bodies are welcome. Regional and national conferences and symposia, such as the two recently held here, are valuable, and we have benefited from the efforts of Iran. Nevertheless, as the Solomon Islands delegate said last year, the dialogue among civilizations raises sensitive questions that call for serious and constructive dialogues rather than unanswered monologues. How these matters are to be addressed, he said, "cannot be left for resolution to the Secretariat or a specialized agency". (*A/53/PV.53, p. 12*)

Moreover, if the dialogue among civilizations is to have any long-term success, it must not be confined to elites to the exclusion of the widest representation of civil society, and that means public information efforts towards the early involvement of the print and electronic media.

Obviously, the planning is under way. It should be open to all of us here in New York, where even the smallest delegations have the opportunity to make useful intellectual contributions.

**Mr. Lee See-Young** (Republic of Korea): At the outset, I would like to express my delegation's appreciation to Ambassador Hadi Nejad Hosseinian of Iran for introducing draft resolution A/54/L.60 this morning, which we support wholeheartedly. I also congratulate him for taking the initiative of organizing the second panel discussion, on 22 November 1999, on the subject of "Dialogue among civilizations", which drew considerable attention from both diplomatic and academic corners. I would also like to commend Mr. Giandomenico Picco, Personal Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, for his well-conceived provisional report, annexed to the Secretary-General's report.

At the dawn of the new millennium, we consider it both timely and appropriate that the international community involve itself in a series of serious dialogues among civilizations here, under the aegis of the United Nations. The United Nations was created as a bulwark against history's deplorable pattern of pitting nation against nation and people against people. In the aftermath of the Second World War, which wracked the world and brought about unfathomable tragedy, the United Nations advanced a world vision where peace, rather than conflict, would prevail over all civilizations on the globe.

Unfortunately, as we look back over the second half of the twentieth century, we cannot but acknowledge that conflicts have never ceased to riddle relations among nations. Moreover, the United Nations in the post-Second World War era has often been called upon to get involved in conflicts resulting from ethnic, religious and cultural tensions that have led far too often to human tragedies. In order to avoid future tragedies, such as those witnessed from the Balkans to the Great Lakes region of Africa, we must address the root causes of these conflicts through the promotion of dialogue among diverse civilizations.

Hence, at this crucial juncture in history, Member States of the United Nations are called upon to garner their political will to create a more fertile environment for dialogue among civilizations. Far too often, we have seen that mere misunderstandings among neighbours, either at the national or international level, can become the very seeds of hostility. If allowed to grow, discord and animosity will surely choke our carefully cultivated peace. This situation is simply not tolerable.

The international community has an obligation to ensure that the much-publicized theme of the "clash of civilizations" does not turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy. In fact, rich diversity among the world's civilizations can and should be a rallying cry for global harmony and prosperity, rather than for clash and conflict. As history has shown, great civilizations have always flourished by sharing their ideas and experiences with other civilizations.

Moreover, in this age of globalization, it is increasingly evident that contact among different peoples from different civilizations and cultures will intensify as

information and communication technologies continue to develop and link us closer together than ever before. Under these circumstances, the international community must be able to provide the normative architecture that will channel this social entropy towards harmony, understanding and peaceful coexistence.

Although an acceptance of diversity and a spirit of tolerance are essential ingredients in the dialogue among civilizations, we cannot deny the existence of universal values which generations all over the world have aspired to and struggled for throughout their respective histories. These universal values are the embodiment of collective wisdom, insights and experiences emanating from different civilizations. They provide rich soil in which the seeds of diversity among civilizations can together be planted and encouraged to flourish.

The United Nations has served for the past half century as a host to all nations and has promoted reconciliation and dialogue among all the peoples of the world. The United Nations is therefore the most appropriate forum to address the issue of dialogue among civilizations. We warmly welcome the designation of the year 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace, and the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. It is also fitting that these two designated years will usher in the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World.

Having inherited consecutively Buddhist and Confucian civilizations in the past, and more recently some elements of Christian and Muslim culture, the Korean people are considered to be well equipped to engage in a dialogue among civilizations conducted in the context of the United Nations. On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Korea, I would like to assure the Assembly that we will make important contributions to the process of consultations and preparation culminating in a successful United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations in the year 2001 and beyond.

**Mr. Lavrov** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): First I should like to take note of the very relevant and timely nature of the item on dialogue among civilizations. It is symbolic that this item was proposed by Iran, which, as is well known, is one of the most ancient States of Asia, having inherited cultural diversity from its great civilizations.

The concept of dialogue among civilizations is consonant with the initiative taken by the President of Russia, Boris Yeltsin in June this year, which is jointly to elaborate the concept of the world for the twenty-first century. We are convinced that a world in which each State is entitled to its rightful place among other nations and to equal security is the bedrock for interaction among different civilizations. A multipolar world, and the transition to it which is dictated by the objective realities of our time, is to us a model which shapes, and is a buffer to, the coexistence of different cultural systems.

We believe that dialogue among civilizations in the context of a multipolar world means that the principles of pluralism and democratization of international life must be strengthened. In practice, this means rejecting attempts to monopolize the inter-State sphere, and the non-use of force and other coercive measures in violation of the Charter of the United Nations and in circumvention of the Security Council.

At the same time, we believe that dialogue within civilizations, by guaranteeing human rights and democratic freedoms and by developing civil society, can stabilize the multipolar world both from the inside and along the contiguous perimeters of its various poles.

Clearly, the establishment of a dialogue among civilizations is urgently required and will enhance the United Nations potential and consolidate its role as a universal mechanism for developing a multilateral cooperation. The United Nations Charter, which from the beginning was a synthesis of interests of various value systems, is the political and legal core of creative interaction among civilizations as we move to a multipolar model of the world.

Today, the words of the Charter which call upon all peoples "to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours" have not only lost none of their moral force, but have become a concrete imperative of history addressed to humankind on the threshold of the twenty-first century.

We read with great interest the provisional report of the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, Giandomenico Picco. We agree with his conclusions that dialogue among civilizations must be all-encompassing, based on the recognition of human rights and cultural pluralism.

At the same time, less obvious to us is the idea that in the context of the United Nations it is appropriate to talk about two types of civilizations: those that perceive diversity as a threat and those that perceive it as an integral component of growth. It is hardly appropriate to create such a line of demarcation; rather, dialogue should be built on the combined efforts of all States and peoples in combating violence, extremism, terrorism, poverty, famine and disease, that is, all those disasters which deny the very essence, the basis, of any civilization.

It was precisely on that understanding that the Russian delegation joined the sponsors of the draft resolution entitled "United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations" whose adoption, we affirm, is the desire of the world community to move towards a world order based on the primacy of law and on universal values, not on the arbitrary excommunication from civilization of whole States and peoples.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker in thus morning's debate on agenda item 34.

*The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.*